



Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson delivered the following statement on Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 195 regarding capital funding for New Jersey's parks to the New Jersey Legislature Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee on June 1, 2006.

Revitalizing New Jersey's Parks and Public Lands through Capital Funding Re-allocations
June 1, 2006

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am delighted to be here this afternoon and I thank you for the opportunity to offer the Governor's as well as my strong support for Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 195 (ACR195). I would especially like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Speaker Roberts as well as Senate President Codey and Senators Smith, Kenny, Sweeney and Lance for the extraordinary leadership and foresight you have all shown in moving this resolution forward. Your constituents are being well served by this constitutional amendment.

At one point in our not too distant past, New Jersey had a park, forest and wildlife management system that was second to none. Unfortunately, as our state steadily grew and became more and more densely populated, and as we acquired more and more public lands, the resources needed to keep these areas in top shape also grew. I am pleased that this committee recognizes that we must keep up with our funding needs in order to maintain a high quality of life for our residents.

Over the past several decades, for understandable budget balancing reasons, the State has deferred critical maintenance and improvements to our public parks. And these areas have certainly begun to show the effects of age and neglect. At this point, my department estimates that at least \$250 million in capital improvements are needed to restore these vital state resources to their former glory. Parks are an asset only when they can be fully and safely enjoyed by the people of New Jersey. State and local lands in every legislative district require improvements.

The resolution that is before you today puts us squarely on the road toward a premier parks system. Governor Corzine believes that New Jersey's citizens deserve nothing less. Furthermore, in these fiscal times this resolution requires no new revenue. It simply reallocates the existing environmental set-aside from the Corporate Business Tax (CBT). It is budget-neutral. By reallocating corporate business tax revenues that are already constitutionally-dedicated to environmental purposes, we are doing this very important work without imposing additional burdens on New Jersey's taxpayers.

In 1996, forward-thinking legislators and the voters of New Jersey dedicated 4 percent of the CBT for environmental purposes. This dedication has been instrumental in addressing a number of challenges faced by the State over the past decade whether they be watershed planning, underground storage tank removal or publicly-funded site remediation.

However, because the distribution of the 4 percent allocation is constitutionally mandated, we have at times found ourselves with surpluses in certain accounts that cannot be spent because the demand has not been there. It is good public policy to make adjustments to ensure that these environmentally dedicated funds are utilized in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

The largest surplus has been the funding for underground storage tanks. The demand simply has not kept up with the revenue allocation. Even after two previous adjustments to relocate funds from Underground Storage Tanks (USTs) to brownfields redevelopment and to diesel retrofits, we anticipate that on July 1 we will have approximately \$90 million in reserve dedicated to USTs. Even with the anticipated changes to the UST Fund law sponsored by you, Mr. Chairman, to allow for grants for non-leaking residential tanks, we do not anticipate the demand to rise significantly beyond its current \$3-4 million per year.

ACR195 would allow us to use the funds that are in reserve for USTs for their original purpose but would redirect future allocations from the UST fund to parks development and maintenance. There is also a slight change in the allocations for watershed programs and a decrease of funds for publicly funded site remediation. The need for cleaning up sites is not likely to diminish in the coming years. However, the right of the people of our state to enjoy our open spaces is as important as any environmental priority. In addition, the resolution as

amended will provide some level of flexibility that has not been there in the past. As amended, if we underestimate the demand for UST grants and loans, the new language will allow for an infusion of money back into the UST fund without having to come back before you and the voters to amend the constitution yet again.

In short, ACR195 is excellent, forward-thinking, just public policy. It will help us to meet vital State purposes and ensure that the monies we receive are used fully and efficiently. This is crucial in this tight budget climate.

I applaud this committee and its chair for expeditiously moving it forward. Governor Corzine has made parks one of his top environmental priorities. This action today is the single most important thing that has happened for our State Park System in a very long time. This action ensures that we are the responsible stewards of these magnificent resources that are placed in our charge. Future generations of New Jersey citizens will thank us for what we do today.

I am available to answer any questions you may have.

